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Community generosity in full force for Kirk Apartment fire victims

ROBIN McCLELLAND Globe Gazette

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Donations are piled high at Salvation Army, 747 Village Green Drive, in Mason City. Fire victims are welcome to come and shop the donations free of charge.

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North Iowans have been quick to put themselves in the shoes of those who lost everything, leading to an outpouring of generosity.

Donations for the victims of April 24th's apartment fire at the Kirk Apartments in Mason City have filled warehouses and will soon be on their way to furnishing new hopes and homes.

Fire victims are invited to come and shop the donations for items they need to begin anew. Both Salvation Army, 747 Village Green Drive, and United Way of North Central Iowa, 2911 Fourth St SE, have items available free of charge to those who have been directly affected by the fire. Stop by during regular business hours or call ahead for other arrangements.

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, Tracy Hedegard-Stump was on scene coordinating food and shelter for shell-shocked residents of the building. In a matter of hours, they lost their homes and all of their possessions, standing by helplessly as the blaze destroyed a historic downtown building.

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While some tenants were able to find accommodations right away, not all of the building's occupants had a place to stay.

"There are seven tenants who needed immediate shelter," Hedegard-Stump says. "We were able to shelter them either at Salvation Army or in a hotel. We've since manage to find all seven housing."

Finding housing in the area is a challenge under normal circumstances and affordable housing even more so. Many of the residents at the Kirk were paying a lower-than-average rental rate and are finding it difficult to secure an apartment or home they can afford.

United Way NCI established a crisis fund almost immediately in response to the fire. "Our Women United group was actually having it's regular meeting at Fat Hill Brewing on that night," says Jen Arends, CEO of UWNCI. "We sat down as the fire was going on and the women knew right away they would make the crisis fund a priority. We raised \$4,000 in seed money that night."

At Salvation Army, rent and rental deposits are paid out from a donated fund. The program helps people who may need a first month's rental deposit or just a hand through the month with an overdue payment.

It was this fund that was used to shelter and feed Kirk residents as they processed their extraordinary loss. Hedegard-Stump is hopeful that North Iowans are still feeling the urge to help. "There are 44 units off the market now, and they were pretty affordable. We now need to help folks with first and last month's rent and deposits for new locations."

And for that, monetary donations are needed.

"The community filled Salvation Army's space up (with donated goods) right away. We are definitely not set up to take donations, but we do have a warehouse, so we offered to take what we could," explains Arends. "Now we're full, too. We can comfortably provide Kirk residents with most of what they need, but the crisis fund is going to be important for incidentals. There are utility deposits and other things that aren't covered by the Salvation Army program, so that's where the crisis fund steps in."

For those who have not yet donated but would like to make an impact, both directors say they've received all the physical donations they can handle. At this point, a financial contribution is appreciated.

Additionally, both warehouses are chock-full of items that need to be transported to Kirk resident's new homes. Those with trucks, vans and trailers are being asked to donate a few hours of their time to help folks move large and heavy materials.

North Iowans stepped up with gifts of clothing, shoes, personal items, even furniture, bedding and electronics.

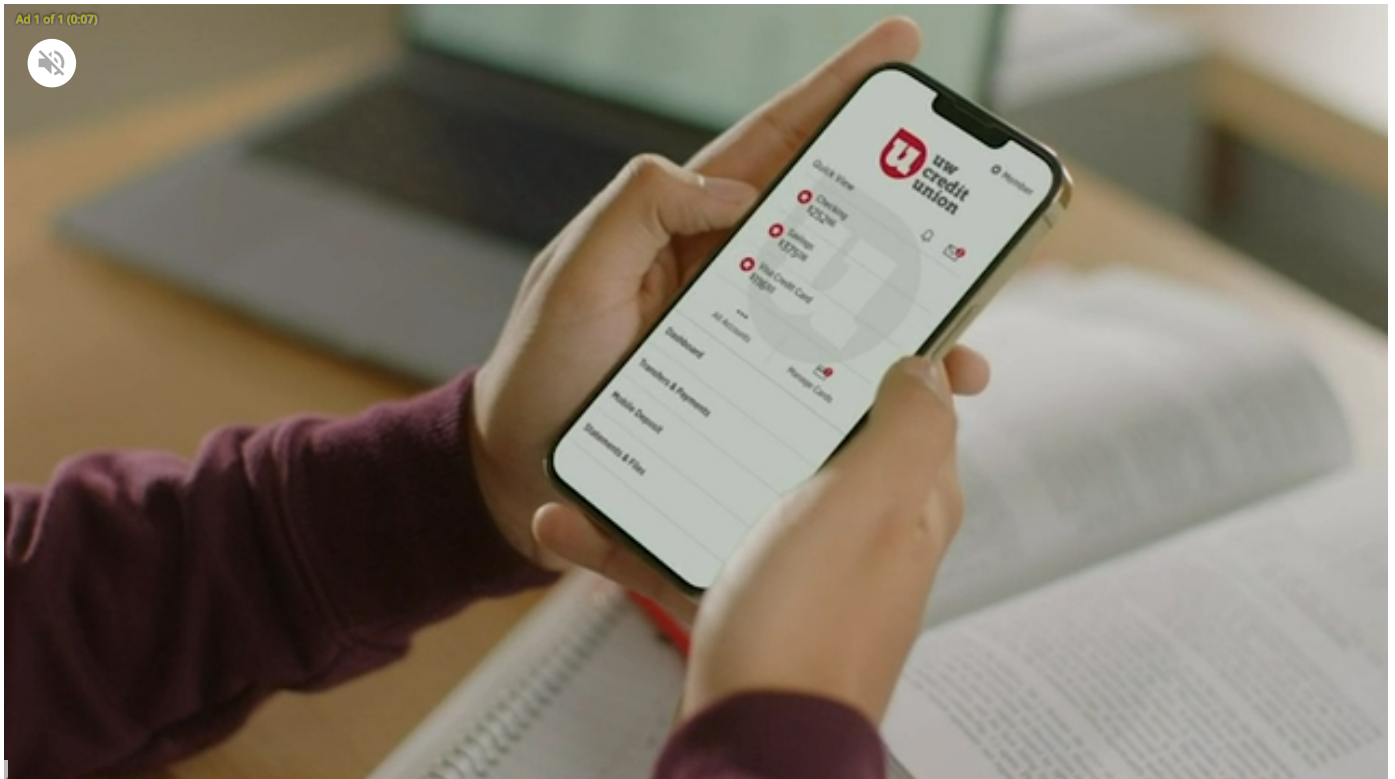
Both Hedegard-Stump and Arends were overwhelmed by the items provided, but each also know of the constant needs in our area. "This event stressed a system that was already stressed," says Arends. "Northern Lights Alliance is almost always at capacity. Friends of the Family has identified 55 individuals in need of permanent shelter. The need in our area is ongoing."

Recurring or one-time financial donations can be made to Salvation Army at www.centralusa.salvationarmy.org/masoncity/. For questions, to offer moving help or to pick up items, please call 641-424-4031.

Recurring or one-time financial donations can be made to United Way of North Central Iowa can be made at www.unitedwaynci.org/. For questions, to donate moving help or pick up items, please call 641-423-1774.

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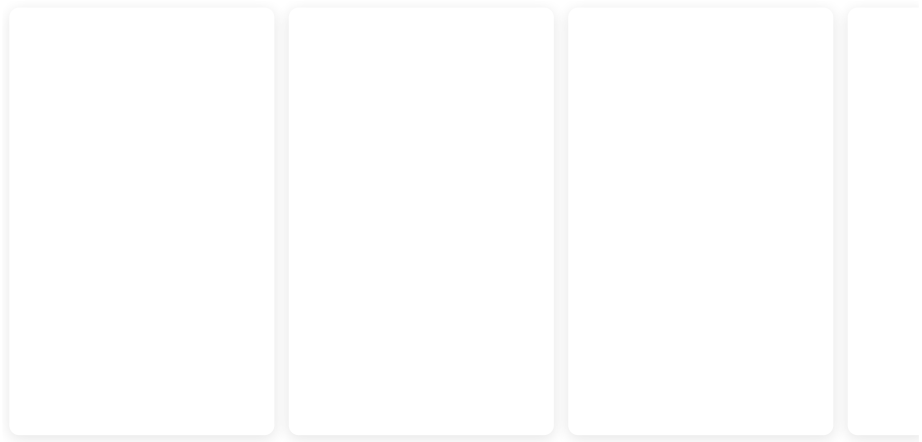
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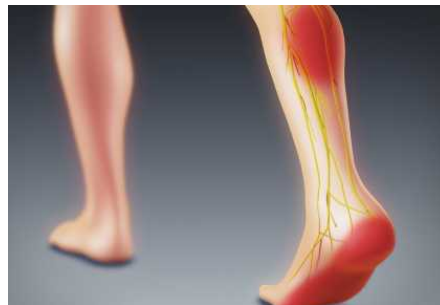
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